

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL) joined colleagues, the family of Matthew Shepard, and other dignitaries at the White House to celebrate the signing of The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. The legislation will extend important protections to victims of violent hate crimes committed based on a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and/or disability. Expanding this federal protection to the LGBT community was the first bill Quigley co-sponsored in Congress, immediately after he was sworn in April of this year.

“In 2008, there were 72 reported hate crimes in the City of Chicago alone. When one of our neighbors is attacked, our entire community feels the pain,” said Congressman Quigley. “Every American, regardless of who his parents are, where she worships, or who he chooses to love, deserves to live free of the fear of harm and senseless, heartbreaking violence. This bill will go a long way towards ensuring all of our citizens have equal access to protection under the law.”

The Act is named after Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr, who were both targeted and murdered for their sexual orientation. Shepard was a gay twenty-one year old college student when he was brutally killed in 1998, eleven years ago this month. Some of the Shepard family, including Matthew's mother, attended today's bill signing at the White House.

The Hate Crimes legislation, which was attached to the Department of Defense authorization bill, includes protections based on sexual orientation or gender identity—the first time gender identity will receive positive protection in federal law. It also strengthens existing hate crimes protections for a variety of other categories, including race, color, religion, national origin and ethnicity.

A longtime and tireless leader in the fight for equality, Quigley [has emerged as a national advocate](#) for the LGBT community, cosponsoring over a dozen bills during his first six months in office that work toward equal rights. Among other efforts, he has called for the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, the Defense of Marriage Act, and is a lead sponsor of the Employment Non Discrimination Act (ENDA).